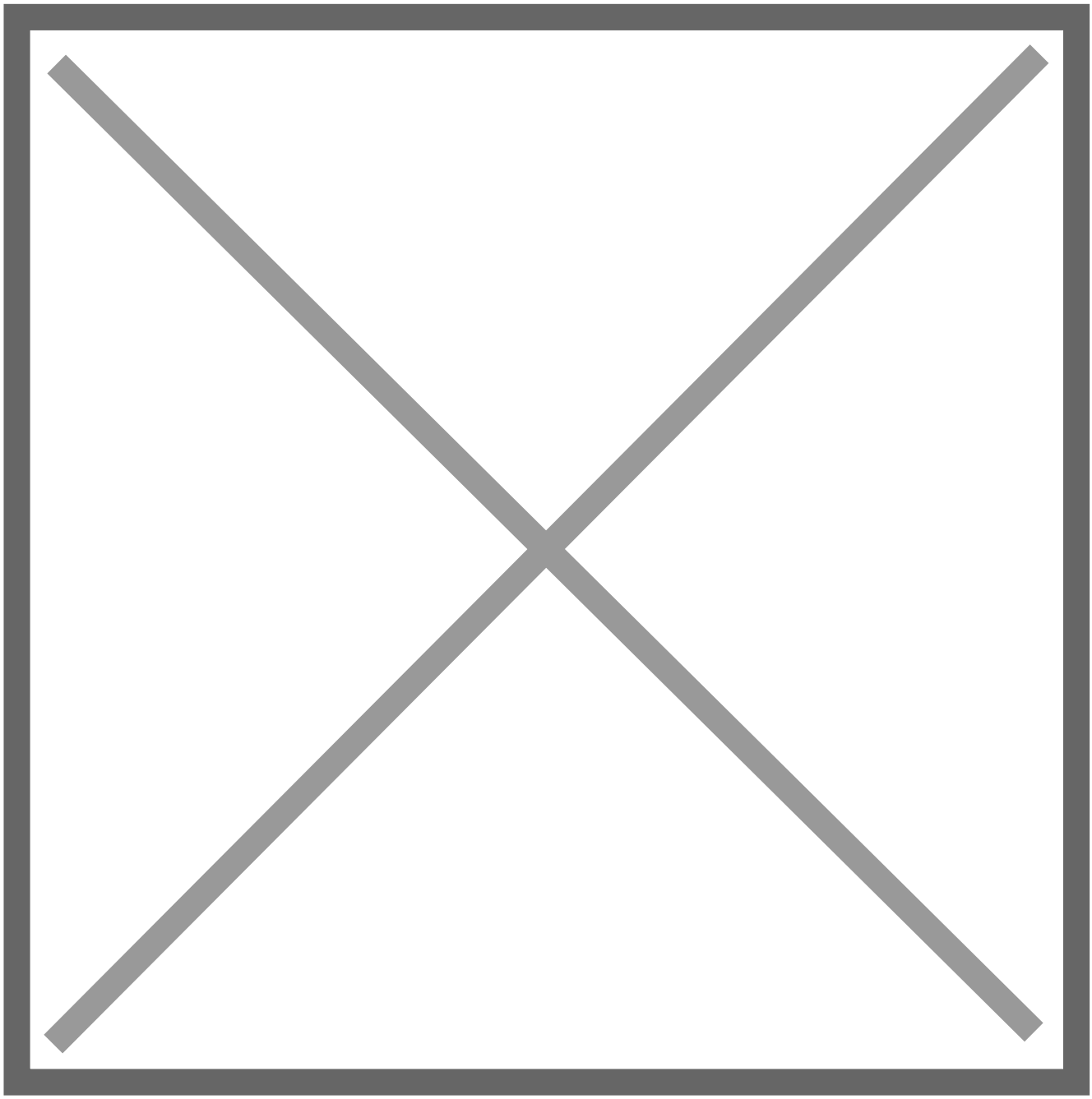
Spirituality
Vatican
Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis leads his general audience in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican April 28, 2021. The pope reflected on the theme of meditation as he continued his series of talks on prayer. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Meditation is more than just a method of stress relief for the body, it is a way of encountering Christ in one's soul, Pope Francis said.

During his weekly general audience April 28, the pope said that although it has become a "widespread activity among people who do not have a religious view of life," meditation within the context of Christian prayer guides men and women "to advance, with the Holy Spirit, along the one way of prayer: Christ Jesus."

"For us Christians, meditating is a way of encountering Jesus. And in this way, only in this way, can we find ourselves," he said.

Continuing his series of talks on prayer, the pope reflected on meditation as a form of prayer Christians use to "seek meaning" within the sacred mysteries and from God's word.

Meditation, however, is also practiced by nonbelievers as well "because it represents a high barrier against the daily stress and emptiness that is everywhere," he noted.

"Here, then, is the image of young people and adults sitting in meditation, in silence, with their eyes half-closed," he said. "What do these people do? They meditate. It is a phenomenon to be welcomed: we are not made to run all the time, we have an

inner life that cannot always be neglected. Meditating is therefore a need for everyone."

Nevertheless, the pope said that for Christians, the use of meditation is not due to an aspiration of "full self-transparency," but first and foremost "an encounter with the Other, with a capital O."

"If an experience of prayer gives us inner peace, or self-mastery, or clarity about the path to take, these results are, one might say, side effects of the grace of Christian prayer, which is the encounter with Jesus. That is, meditating means going forward — guided by a verse from Scripture, from a word — to the encounter with Jesus within us," he said.

Departing from his prepared remarks, the pope said that while there are many methods that are "important and worthy of practice," Christian meditation "is not possible without the Holy Spirit."

"Jesus told us, 'I will send you the Holy Spirit; he will teach you and explain to you,'" the pope said. "In meditation as well, he is the guide to go forward in the encounter with Jesus Christ."

Francis said that the grace of Christian prayer is the knowledge that "Christ is not far away but is always in a relationship with us."

He encouraged Christians to meditate on the Gospels so that the Holy Spirit "may guide us to be present there."

"This is not a withdrawal into ourselves, no, no," the pope said. Christian meditation involves "going to Jesus and from Jesus, to meet ourselves — healed, risen, strong — because of the grace of Jesus. And to encounter Jesus, the savior of all, including me. And this is thanks to the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

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